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## Anniversary of Cuba's Historic July 11 Protests: Two Years and Counting



Two years ago, on July 11, 2021, thousands of Cubans participated in a mass nationwide protest, peacefully demanding that their government adopt basic civil liberties and political freedoms. The scale of the protests caught the Cuban regime by surprise, as it did the rest of the world. But the Cuban regime's response was, unfortunately, not surprising.



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By Giselle Gutierrez | July 11, 2023 at 12:05 PM

This year marks the second anniversary of the Cuban regime's violent suppression of peaceful protests and demonstrations across the island nation. Two years ago, on July 11, 2021, thousands of Cubans participated in a mass nationwide protest, peacefully demanding that their government adopt basic civil liberties and political freedoms. The scale of the protests caught the Cuban regime by surprise, as it did the rest of the world. But the Cuban regime's response was, unfortunately, not surprising.

In the midst of protests that were rapidly spreading from city to city across the island, Cuban leader Miguel Diaz-Canel took to national television to incite violence against these peaceful protesters by telling the regime's supporters and security forces that "the order to fight has been given." Adding, "we're ready for anything and we'll be in the streets fighting. There are many of us revolutionaries in this town who are willing to give our lives ... And this is not a slogan, it is a conviction. They protesters have to go over our dead bodies if they want to confront the revolution." Seizing upon the combative language promulgated by its leadership, the Cuban regime then confronted its citizenry in the streets, and in their own homes, with bloody brutality. It immediately cracked down on the protesters with intimidation, force, and unlawful detentions.

Remarkably, for the first time in Cuba's history, these human rights violations were exposed by electronic means thanks to social media and the internet, which has become more widely available on the island. However, when it was discovered that news of the protests and of the regime's response to it was spreading via social media, the Cuban regime took immediate measures to shut down the country's internet access, preventing its citizens from documenting and sharing the human rights violations committed by, and with the approval of, the regime.

Over 1,000 individuals were unlawfully detained and most were charged with bogus crimes, such as “public disorder” or “propagation of the pandemic.” In truth, their only act was to speak out against their own repressive government at a moment in Cuba’s history when the world’s eyes were upon it. Individuals participating in the protests were thereafter convicted in sham trials by a judiciary lacking in any independence, led by judges who are subordinate to the leadership of the Communist Party—the only officially recognized political party in Cuba, which Article 5 of its Constitution identifies as “the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation” and “the superior driving force of the society and the State.” Their detentions and convictions have been condemned by the U.S. government as well as foreign governments and international organizations, including the United Nations and the European Union.

Subsequent to these detentions, on Nov. 17, 2021, the Cuban American Bar Association, Inc. (CABA), a voluntary bar organization composed of licensed attorneys and judges in the United States and one of the largest voluntary bars in the state of Florida, initiated proceedings before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on behalf of 52 Cuban activists, artists, citizens, dissidents and victims who remain arbitrarily detained or unjustly imprisoned as a result of the July 11, 2021 protests—i.e., *Cuban American Bar Association v. República de Cuba*; Petition No. 0000063750. The IACHR is an autonomous arm of the Organization of American States (OAS) headquartered in Washington, D.C., and examines allegations of human rights violations in the Americas.

Among those represented by CABA in the pending petition are prominent members of Cuban human rights and pro-democracy organizations, including Luis Manuel Otero Alcantara, Jose Daniel Ferrer Garcia, Daniel Joel Cardenas Diaz and Maria Cristina Garrido Rodriguez. Since July 11, 2021, CABA has worked with a dedicated team of volunteers, including human rights activist Omar Lopez Montenegro and members of Cuba Decide, to compile information from communications authored by dissidents, their family members, and witness interviews, in an effort to identify and document human rights violations by the Cuban regime against its own people.

CABA’s petition against the Cuban state alleges violations of some of the most basic and fundamental human rights recognized by all democratic countries in the world. These human rights are also recognized by the OAS’s American Declaration of Human Rights, which include: right to freedom of expression, assembly, and dissemination of ideas; right to a fair trial; right to humane treatment; right to liberty and to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention; right to protection, honor, dignity, privacy, and inviolability of the home; right to vocation; and right to participate in government. CABA’s petition asks the IACHR to set a hearing date for the presentation of the petitioners’ cases and to take precautionary measures that include, but are not limited to, directing the Cuban state to release all of the petitioners, reverse their convictions, and demands that the Cuban state release all who were unlawfully detained or imprisoned for exercising universally recognized rights, as set forth in the American Declaration of Human Rights.

The IACHR is arguably the most important human rights body of the Western Hemisphere. Accordingly, CABA calls on IACHR Commissioner Edgar Stuardo

Ralón and OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro to set a hearing date for its petition and respectfully requests that the IACHR act swiftly and not permit the crimes committed by Cuba's regime to go unchallenged. The brave men and women who languish in prison today should not be forgotten. They deserve to be more than a passing footnote in Cuba's history, as their individual human rights are worthy of attention and protection.

*Giselle Gutierrez is president of the Cuban American Bar Association (CABA). CABA is a nonprofit voluntary bar association founded in 1974 by lawyers of Cuban descent. As one of the state of Florida's largest voluntary bar associations, CABA's membership today is comprised of lawyers, judges and law students across the nation of all backgrounds interested in issues impacting Cubans and the Cuban diaspora, as well as those broader legal and human rights issues impacting minority communities as a whole. Gutierrez is also a shareholder at Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson in Miami, Florida. Contact her at [ggutierrez@stearnsweaver.com](mailto:ggutierrez@stearnsweaver.com).*

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